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ABSTRACT

Examples are given of classroom situations which pose challenges or problems for teachers. The reasons the problems arose are discussed, and alternative suggestions are made for handling them. Discussions include classroom interactions among teachers and students in these areas: (1) using students' time efficiently; (2) classroom arrangement and teacher mobility during class-time activities; (3) securing students' interest in problem-solving lessons and involving all students in the lessons; (4) establishing rules of conduct, clarifying the purposes of rules and communicating and enforcing rules; (5) avoiding miscommunication by maintaining teacher on-task behavior, holding student interest, sending clear messages, using supportive replies to students, and avoiding the labeling of students; and (6) dealing with off-task behavior. A bibliography of writings on classroom techniques is included. (JD)

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COOPERATION IN THE CLASSROOM:

Students and Teachers Together

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Analysis and Action Series

COOPERATION IN THE CLASSROOM:

Students and Teachers Together

James S. Cangelosi

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To Anna Marie and Rosario
who taught me to be original.

To Allison, Amanda, Amy, Casey, and Chris
who taught me what is important.

To Barb
who taught me love.

. . . how much patience it requires to recall vagrant inattention, to stimulate sluggish indifference, and to rectify absurd misapprehension.

—Samuel Johnson

We shape our buildings;
thereafter, they shape us.

—Winston Churchill

There is a difference between popularity and a genuine helping relationship.

—Kevin Ryan and James Cooper

And should you open your ears and listen,
you would hear your own voice in all voices.

—Kahlil Gibran

PREFACE

Teachers can justifiably "blame" inattentiveness, lack of effort, disruptive behavior, and general lack of cooperation on students' personality traits or on the lack of support provided by society, families, and school administrators. But even in the face of unfavorable attitudes and conditions, teachers can still manage to overcome seemingly impossible circumstances and elicit students' attention, effort, and cooperation. How can middle and secondary school teachers achieve such a result? This is the question addressed by *Cooperation in the Classroom: Students and Teachers Together.*

This book is designed for classroom teachers. It is filled with suggestions that are an outgrowth of the findings of numerous studies of behavior management and student engagement, or participation, as well as classroom teaching experiences. The strategies presented here were developed with the help and cooperation of the thousands of students and teachers who have worked with me over the past 18 years. I am most grateful to them as I am to Barb Rice, who served as my copyreader and advisor and remained nearby to keep me conscious of the everyday realities of classroom teachers working in less-than-ideal circumstances.

Chapter 1

FINDING YOURSELF

> Nobody can be taught faster than he can learn. . . . Every man that has ever undertaken to instruct others can tell what slow advances he has been able to make, and how much patience it requires to recall vagrant inattention, to stimulate sluggish indifference, and to rectify absurd misapprehension.
>
> —Samuel Johnson, *Life of Milton*

Suppose with me for one terrible moment that you can not only see and hear your students while you are conducting lessons, but you can also read their thoughts. Now further imagine that, while leading a discussion session during a particular lesson, with your newly acquired mind-reading ability you observe the following three students.

1. Valerie is quite bored with the lesson and is carrying on a lively conversation with her friend Betty about the TV show that she watched last night.
2. Laura looks at you attentively; her thoughts are filled with admiration for you. She is not concentrating on the discussion so much as she is concerned with leaving a positive impression on you and receiving high marks.
3. Katrina is listening intently to what you and other students are saying. She struggles to formulate answers to questions that are raised in the discussion. She doesn't concern herself with thoughts of you or the quality of the lesson.

With which one of the three students do you feel most successful? Be honest with yourself. I hope your answer is Katrina. Her participation should maximize the lesson's benefits for her.

A student like Katrina, who is participating in a lesson in the manner in which it was designed, is said to be "on task" (48)* or "engaged" (31) in the lesson. A student like Laura, who is not involved and participating in a lesson as it was designed, is said to be "off task" (35) or "disengaged" (9) in the lesson. A student like Valerie, who is not only off task but is also preventing other students from being on task, is said to be "disruptive."

While it is highly unusual for a teacher to prefer students to be disruptive, unfortunately many teachers are not committed to maintaining student engagement (13). Here is an example:

In attempting to explain a solution to a problem in class, Mr. McDonald says, ". . . so we know that *y* has to be larger than *x*." Amy interrupts: "But can't the square of a number be less than the number?" "Of course not," Mr. McDonald replies. Amy: "But the square of one-half is one-fourth and one-fourth is less than one-half. Isn't it?" Mr. McDonald feels a rush of embarrassment in front of the class. He experiences no satisfaction with Amy's astute observation because he feels that she has made him appear "stupid." He resents her observations and tries to mask his embarrassment and resentment by focusing on the fact that she interrupted him. "Amy, you know you shouldn't talk out without first being recognized," he snaps. "I know that one-half squared is one-fourth, but we were talking only about whole numbers. That's something you weren't supposed to know yet." Amy: "Yes sir."

Amy becomes quiet and does not interrupt again. Although she is not disruptive, she is no longer engaged in the lesson. She does not listen to the mathematical explanations as she continues to think about Mr. McDonald's anger.

Because Mr. McDonald continues to feel embarrassed, his explanations become more rambling and he repeats himself. The students sit politely and think about other things.

A school principal walking into the classroom just after Mr. McDonald "put Amy in her place" would see no disruptive behavior and

*Numbers in parentheses appearing in the text refer to the Bibliography beginning on page 59.

might think that the class was quite attentive. However, teachers like Mr. McDonald, who feel compelled to display their superiority over students, are unlikely to maintain high levels of student engagement (35).

Where do your priorities lie? How committed are you to maintaining high levels of engagement for all your students? Do you feel just as responsible for helping those who seem bored and unimpressed as you do for helping those who seem to hang on to every word you utter?

This book can help you achieve greater cooperation from all the students in your classroom. It offers classroom-tested strategies that can decrease the incidence of disruption and also increase student engagement in your lessons.

WHO OR WHAT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR STUDENTS' CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR?

What causes students to be off task—either disruptively or nondisruptively— when they should be engaged in lessons? Some teachers with whom I raised this question emphasized factors over which they had no control. Here are some of their responses:

> Two of my students were so stoned in class today that they couldn't think straight. This happens because there are drug dealers all over this town.
>
> Jim talked incessantly during a silent reading session today because the classes at our school are too large for anyone to maintain order.
>
> Arlette failed to do her homework assignment because her parents let her watch television all night instead of encouraging her to do schoolwork.
>
> Charlene and Marion are more interested in each other than they are in history, so they talked to each other instead of listening to my history lecture.

Any undesirable, off-task behavior that a student exhibits while under the direction of a teacher can be "blamed" on the student or on

causes outside the teacher's domain. But both the student and the teacher are responsible for the student's engagement or lack of engagement in a lesson. It is tempting to focus the "blame" for off-task behaviors on society, television, parents, or other factors. Too-large classes, excessive paper work required by administrators, unexpected interruptions (such as band members being called out of the classroom during a lesson), uncooperative parents, time-consuming school board regulations, student accessibility to debilitating drugs, lack of suitable equipment—these may be only a few of the obstacles that make it difficult for teachers to keep students engaged in their lessons. It is of course important to work to eliminate such factors. Nevertheless, until all the battles are won, teachers need to focus on what they can do to keep students engaged and on task even in the face of these constraints.

This book does not provide you with solutions for reducing class size, making administrators more responsive to your needs, or ridding society of drugpushers. It does, however, suggest techniques that you can use to keep students engaged in lessons, techniques that you can apply in spite of the unfavorable conditions under which you may operate.

In many situations, off-task behavior is more "normal" for students than engaged behavior. For example, in the last response cited, Marion and Charlene's greater interest in each other than in history is not only expected, but it is often considered healthy. In fact, off-task behavior such as relaxing is sometimes more natural for students than is absorption in taking lecture notes. Thus the more useful question for teachers may be, What causes students to become engaged in lessons?—rather than, What causes them to be off task?

Chapter 2

MANAGING TIME AND SPACE

> By doing nothing,
> men learn to do evil.
>
> —Columella, *De rustica*

> We shape our buildings;
> thereafter, they shape us.
>
> —Winston Churchill

USING STUDENTS' TIME EFFICIENTLY

Mr. Grah, a teacher of 28 seventh graders, plans to conduct an activity in which students work in pairs with $60 in play money. His lesson goes as follows:

The students begin to file into Mr. Grah's room after lunch. The noise level is what one would expect for such a situation. Mr. Grah waits for everyone to be seated and quiet down somewhat. Then he raises his voice slightly to give the following directions: "All right! I want you to find yourselves a partner . . . You and your partner should sit next to each other at a worktable." With some jockeying the students shuffle to be with the partners of their choice. Initially some students have no partners and others have two. After a few incidents with such comments as "Why do I have to be with David? I always get stuck with David!" and "I wanna be with Barbara!" the students settle down with partners at the worktables. The process uses 11 minutes. A little concerned over the confusion, Mr.

Grah speaks louder than before, "I am going to pass out $60 to each pair." As he begins to count and distribute the play money, students react with questions and remarks such as "What are we going to do?" "Oh! I thought it was going to be real money!" "Mr. Grah, you gave us only $50!" It takes the teacher 15 minutes to distribute the desired amount to each set of partners, during which time instances of off-task conversations, doodling, and daydreaming occur. Mr. Grah gives directions for the lesson, but by then several students have lost interest and about 30 minutes have elapsed. (16)

Like Mr. Grah, Ms. Hernandez teaches 28 seventh graders. She also wants to conduct the same activity with her class that Mr. Grah conducted. However, she prepares for her class with greater care. Before the students enter the room, Ms. Hernandez places 14 different numerals (for example, "58") at each of 14 work stations that she has set up. She has also prepared 28 five-by-eight-inch cards (one for each student) similar to the card pictured in Table 1. The numbers at the top of each card are to be computed. These numbers have been selected so that each card has only one matching answer among the other cards. For example, a card with "1566/27" at the top would match only the one shown in Table 1. Thus the students who obtained these two cards would be partners at station "58."

Table 1
ONE OF MS. HERNANDEZ'S 28 5 x 8-inch CARDS

29 x 2
Go to the place at the worktable that has a number equal to the number at the top of this card. There you will meet your partner. After you and your partner arrive and are seated at the table, locate the envelope taped under the table top. Remove the envelope and open it. Inside you will find $60 in play money and instructions on what you and your partner should do with it. Good luck!

Ms. Hernandez determines who will be partners with whom by placing one card in each person's desk before the students arrive in the classroom. Her selection keeps "troublemakers" apart, matches students who work well together, and takes advantage of student personality traits of which she is aware. The lesson goes as follows:

The students begin to file into the room after lunch. The noise level is what one would expect for such a situation. Standing at the doorway, Ms. Hernandez announces in a soft voice to each group of five or six students as they enter, "Go directly to your desk and follow the directions on the card that you will find there." When the students pick up their cards, they are busy reading and computing, and because they are curious about what they are to do, there is little off-task behavior. Because the teacher is not busy trying to provide directions to the entire class at once, she is able to circulate among the students, nipping discipline problems before they start.

Six minutes after the students began entering the room, all are working on the lesson with their partners. A few started working after only three minutes because they did not have to wait for directions. Significantly, the time that Ms. Hernandez's students spent obtaining directions and starting the planned lesson involved them in practice in computation and reading, and in acquiring a curiosity about the upcoming activity. (16)

Mr. Grah's students exhibited off-task behaviors while waiting for other students to enter the room and move to their places, while waiting for the teacher's directions, while jockeying for partners, and while waiting for materials to be distributed. Ms. Hernandez's students did not have to waste time doing any of these things. By thoroughly preparing for her lesson, Ms. Hernandez used her students' time more efficiently and gave students much less opportunity to be off task than did Mr. Grah.

Students with idle time on their hands are more likely to be disruptive than those who are busy (29). There are approximately 525,600 minutes in a year. For a 40-year-old teacher, each minute represents 1/21,024,000 or 0.000000048 of that teacher's lifetime. But for a 13-year-old student, each minute represents 1/6,832,800 or 0.000000146 of that student's lifetime. Thus the student perceives each minute to be approximately three times longer than does the teacher. The younger the person, the longer each moment seems to last.

Time is perceived to pass more slowly when a person is idle than when busy (32). Thus, when a student spends time idly waiting for the busy teacher, what seems to be a brief wait to the older person can seem an eternity to the younger one. Students tend to entertain themselves during these "eternities" by becoming disruptive.

You can plan lessons to minimize the time students spend receiving directions and getting started. Your preparation can also serve to free you from the burden of "running the show" during many lessons. When you are not lecturing, for example, you can be free to supervise and take care of any incidents of off-task behavior as they arise. In addition, planning a lesson so that it runs itself allows you to deal with the problem of one person without disrupting all students.

Here are some suggestions for planning lessons so that students' time is used efficiently.

1. Prepare visual displays prior to class meetings.

Do you ever spend class time with your back to students, writing on a chalkboard? If you do, try to limit this use of your students' time to making very brief notes that confine you to the board only momentarily. Whenever you need to present visual material, consider preparing it ahead of time. You can save much student time and be much more attentive to your class if you instantaneously display prepared material on an overhead transparency instead of writing on a chalkboard during class time.

2. Occasionally, direct students into lessons using handouts and modes other than oral presentations to the whole group.

In the initial anecdote of this chapter, Mr. Grah attempted to start his students on a planned lesson by giving the whole group verbal instructions. Those students who were ready to listen to the teacher sooner than others had to wait for everyone to settle down before they received the directions. In the second anecdote, Ms. Hernandez wrote out her instructions for the lesson in advance on cards and inside envelopes for each student to read. Not needing to tell everyone what to do at the same time afforded her the opportunity to move about the room to help, prod, or encourage those who needed it.

You can often avoid hassles and off-task student behaviors by using handouts and modes other than oral presentations to the whole group to communicate directions. Sometimes these alternatives are not practical, but when the lesson directions are complex or individualized and students can read, Ms. Hernandez's approach is usually more time-efficient than Mr. Grah's.

3. **Sometimes prepare and distribute materials before students arrive in class.**

Distributing materials ahead of time can be highly efficient, as it was for Ms. Hernandez. However, materials that are in the possession (or even sight) of students before they are needed can be quite distracting. Sealed envelopes or some other type of container can keep materials out of sight and may even heighten students' curiosity about upcoming lessons.

4. **Use intraclass grouping to reduce student time spent waiting turns to be involved in lessons.**

Here are two contrasting examples that illustrate this suggestion:

Coach Caferell is drilling 13 baseball players on fielding ground balls. The players form a single line. The coach, standing some 70 feet away, throws a ground ball to the first player in line who attempts to scoop up the ball and throw it back to the coach. During this exercise, Coach Caferell provides words of encouragement and advice on techniques. Then the player goes to the end of the line to await another turn.

Coach Bergeron is drilling 13 baseball players on fielding ground balls. The players are divided into five groups of two and one group of three. Each group has a ball and the partners take turns either throwing ground balls or fielding them. Coach Bergeron circulates among the groups providing encouragement and advice on techniques.

Coach Caferell did not keep his players involved in the lesson; his players spent more time waiting in line than they spent practicing and learning. Because of his use of grouping, Coach Bergeron's students did more work in a shorter amount of time.

5. **Once you decide to use a grouping arrangement for a lesson, carefully devise a plan for getting students into the groups.**

If you decide to use a certain kind of intraclass grouping for a lesson, you must design a method for students to find their particular subgroups. The way you handle such a seemingly simple task can mean

the difference between efficient grouping and the loss of valuable learning time.

You can decide (as did Mr. Grah) to have students determine their own grouping. Such an approach seems democratic enough and for many situations it is highly appropriate. However, it may result in the time-wasting behaviors that Mr. Grah's students exhibited. While necessary for some situations, student selection of their own groups opens up the potential for arguing and jockeying and may also lead to injured feelings when some indiviudals are excluded from a group. Obviously, this democratic option is not available when you wish to place certain students together and keep others apart.

Following are examples of two teachers controlling subgroup composition. In the first situation, the teacher's very businesslike approach leads to rapid student engagement. In the second, the teacher's use of a learning game facilitates group placement.

Ms. Maggio greets each member of her science class at the door of the classroom with a sheet of directions indicating where to go and what to do with whom. According to the directions, several subgroups are to perform experiments at specified stations around the room. Some minor disruptive complaints and some expressions of delight over the assignments are heard as the students move toward their stations. Two students unsuccessfully attempt to engage the teacher in an argument about her group choices for them.

Mr. Lambert wants his 33 history students to engage in a lesson in which they work in groups of threes. Prior to the lesson, he prepares 33 index cards. In one set, each of 11 cards contains the name of a different former U.S. president; in a second set, each of 11 cards contains the inauguration date of one of these presidents; and in a third set, each of 11 cards contains the name of the state in which one of these presidents was born. As the lesson is about to begin, Mr. Lambert hands each student a card. He does not care to control the exact composition of each subgroup during the lesson, but he wants to keep certain students apart. To do this, he gives each two students to be separated either two "president cards," two "date cards," or two "state cards." Then he instructs them to find their partners by locating the pair of cards that matches their own. Mr. Lambert's room is equipped with numerous reference books in which students are able to locate the necessary information. Thus, the time students spend locating their partners they also spend using reference books and discussing the content of the lesson.

---

6. Dispense with classroom administrative duties as efficiently and quickly as possible.

On numerous occasions, I have observed teachers spending 20 minutes of a 55-minute period taking roll, obtaining a lunch count, checking homework, collecting admit slips, and dealing with other administrative matters. These delays not only waste class time, they also distract students from the real business of learning and make it more difficult for them to get on task when the time for a lesson finally arrives. Streamlining administrative chores can save a great deal of learning time. For example, once you know your students, you can determine who is present while checking homework or you can quickly count heads while students are busy with the lesson. Prepared forms with students' names and blocks for checking attendance, lunch status, homework status, and so on can also help you to dispense with recordkeeping and other routine matters with minimal infringement on class time.

TEACHER MOBILITY AND CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENT

Is one of your students more likely to be off task when you are nearby or when you are across the room? Research findings suggest that you and your students are indeed unusual if you answered "nearby" (60). Compare the lesson styles of Ms. Stuckley and Mr. Coleman in the following anecdotes:

While conducting a grammar lesson for a class of 32 ninth graders, Ms. Stuckley stands by the chalkboard at the front of her classroom. She reads aloud from the textbook she holds in her hands and highlights salient points from the reading by listing them on the chalkboard. The students sit in their seats. They have been directed to follow the reading in their books, and to attend to Ms. Stuckley's comments and to her notes on the board.

Ms. Stuckley shifts her eyes from the book, to the students, to the chalkboard, and the lesson continues. Some students read along and are quite attentive, especially those sitting in the front row. The attention of other students, especially those near the rear of the room, occasionally drifts from the lesson. Because their attention lapses a few times, some students do not follow the last part of the lesson and begin to lose interest.

While conducting a grammar lesson for his ninth graders, Mr. Coleman circulates among his 32 students. He reads from the textbooks of various students over their shoulders and makes comments. He has appointed one student to stand in front of the class with a textbook to record notes on the chalkboard as he highlights salient points from the reading.

When Mr. Coleman notices a student's attention drifting away from the lesson, he moves toward the student, finds his place in the student's book with a finger or simply puts a hand on the student's shoulder, and reads.

Plan to conduct your classes (as Mr. Coleman did) so that you can move about the room without disrupting the lesson. This suggestion will be easier to follow if your classroom is arranged so that you can easily move between any points in the room. Questions concerning optimum classroom size and ideal room shape have been studied extensively (54). Unfortunately, most teachers have had little or nothing to say about either the design or the size of their classrooms. Therefore they must make the most of the situation by careful and creative room arrangement. One way to do this is to break out of the traditional rectangular array of desks and modify the arrangement so that you can be within physical reach of any student as fast as you can walk across the room.

Chapter 3

SECURING STUDENTS' INTEREST

> There is a space between man's imagination and man's attainment that may only be traversed by his longing.
>
> —Kahlil Gibran, *Sand and Foam*

PROBLEM-SOLVING LESSONS

It is important that teachers realize that students often fail to remain engaged in lessons because they find the activities to be either boring or irrelevant to their concerns (30). It may not be possible to deny students their perceptions. But it is possible to modify at least some of the lessons, to make them more interesting to students and to make them address student concerns more directly. I do not suggest that lessons should be "fun and games." On the contrary, lessons are serious business.

First of all, examine the goals and objectives of your lessons and determine how, if at all, your students will benefit from accomplishing each goal. When I examined the goals of my lessons, I found that they fell into four categories:

1. Goals that address my students' needs which they perceive as important.
2. Goals that address my students' needs but which they do not perceive as important.

3. Goals that do not address my students' needs but for which I am held responsible by supervisors for helping students attain.
4. Goals that do not address my students' needs for which I am not held responsible by supervisors for helping students attain.

I have little difficulty developing lessons that produce high levels of student engagement when those lessons have goals that fall in the first category. I will not, however, get students engaged in lessons with goals in the second category unless I design mechanisms into those lessons that help students discover for themselves that the goals are indeed something important for them to accomplish. I have never been very successful in telling students how important something is, but I have been highly successful (as have many other teachers) in getting students to realize the importance of a lesson by using a problem-solving approach (7). Two contrasting anecdotes illustrate this approach. The first involves a history unit designed to help students accomplish a goal in a traditional manner. The second involves a history unit using a problem-solving approach to help students accomplish the same goal.

Mr. Remigus designs a two-week unit to help his high school history class accomplish the following learning goal: "Students will better understand the workings of the U.S. Congress between 1901 and 1935." The unit consists of the following learning activities:

1. Mr. Remigus lectures on the importance of understanding the workings of Congress during the era to be studied.
2. The class is assigned to read a chapter in a textbook and to answer the corresponding questions in the supplemental workbook.
3. Mr. Remigus reviews answers to workbook questions with the class.
4. Students are assigned special topics (e.g., the fight for women's suffrage and the Prohibition Act) on which they are to complete library papers.

Ms. Boeker designs a two-week unit to help her high school history class accomplish the following learning goal: "Students will better understand the workings of the U.S. Congress between 1901 and 1935." Ms. Boeker makes a number of observations of her students in order to identify current issues that concern them. She decides to focus on the following problems:

1. Should marijuana be legalized?
2. What should the federal government do about unemployment?
3. What should Congress do to ensure the rights of ethnic minorities?
4. Does the United States need an Equal Rights Amendment?
5. What should the federal government do about abortions?
6. What stand should the federal government take on combating pollution?

Ms. Boeker decides to build the learning activities of her two-week unit around these six current problems. When her plan is implemented, the lesson follows this course:

1. Ms. Boeker assigns each class member to one of six task groups (according to her perceptions of student interests and her choice of student groups). One group, consisting of six students, is directed to "research" the first problem, concerning the legalization of marijuana. These students are to examine how Congress handled the prohibition of alcohol in the first 30 years of the twentieth century and then relate those "lessons of history" to the current question of marijuana. Specifically, the group is directed to explain Congress's rationale for repealing prohibition, including the benefits and consequences of the repeal, and to identify both similarities and differences between the question of alcohol prohibition in the earlier era and marijuana prohibition today. Each of the other five task groups, consisting of about six students each, researches one of the other five problems in the same manner.

2. Ms. Boeker provides each task group with an organizational structure within which to operate, a list of resources from which to acquire information, a list of deadlines for specific subtasks, and an indication of how to report findings to the rest of the class and to the teacher.

3. In order to obtain an overall picture of the climate within which the Congress operated from 1901 to 1935, and thus to be better able to compare the problems of that time with those of the present, each student is directed to read a textbook chapter dealing with the years from 1901 to 1935.

4. Each task group receives a schedule for making periodic progress reports to the entire class.

5. After each task group presents its final report to the class, a brief meeting is held for all class members who were not part of the reporting group, with members of the reporting group acting as observers. At the meeting, students consider and vote upon the task group proposals that relate to the current problem.

Which of the two units do you think better held the students' interest? Mr. Remigus attempted to get his students to recognize the value of their activity by telling them about the value. But telling is not teaching. Ms. Boeker's plan focused her students' attention on problems that were very real to them, which they had a desire to solve. Her lessons did not divorce history from students' current concerns. As a result, their learning served a very real purpose in the minds of her students. The teacher did not have to tell the students how important the lesson was because its importance became apparent to them.

It is, of course, virtually impossible to develop a lesson focusing on students' concerns if the goal does not address students' needs (that is, if it is a goal in the third or fourth category described earlier). Goals that do not address students' needs should be eliminated from the curriculum. If supervisors expect you to teach to such goals, then you may need to use a fun-and-games approach to maintain student engagement until you are able to convince the supervisors that the goals are inappropriate.

INVOLVING ALL STUDENTS IN LESSONS

Do you use questioning strategies in your lessons? Learning theory suggests that you should (47, 79) and research suggests that you are typical if you do (62). The following is an example of a questioning strategy session that I observed:

Ms. Ling uses an overhead projector to display six sequences to 29 mathematics students. She asks, "What do you see?" Willie: "Some numbers." Ms. Ling: "Anything special about all six sets of numbers?" Anna Mae: "There is an order." Ms. Ling: "What's an ordered set called?" Anna Mae: "A sequence!" Nettie: "Or a vector." Ms. Ling: "So we have six sequences or vectors . . . What else do you notice? . . . Okay, Willie?" Willie: "Three of them are written in blue and the rest in red. Why is that?" Woodrow: "Because she used different pens, you . . ." Ms. Ling (interrupting Woodrow): "The sequences in red are special. They belong together for a reason other than that I used the same pen to write them out." "I know!" shouts Ory, raising his hand. Ms. Ling: "Okay?" Ory: "The blue numbers are all perfect squares!"

Nettie: "No, 90 isn't a perfect square!" Ms. Ling: "Anna Mae, thanks for raising your hand. What do you think?" Anna Mae: "All the members of any red sequence have a common factor."

Ms. Ling's inductive questioning strategy session leading to the discovery of geometric sequences continues.

What is your opinion of this brief glimpse of Ms. Ling's lesson? I am impressed with her approach to helping students conceptualize. However, I am concerned that only several of the 29 students appeared involved in the session. Like most teachers, Ms. Ling provided very little time between each of her questions and each student's answer (4). Only students who were quick to respond and outspoken like Anna Mae and Willie became engaged in the lesson. Imagine some ways that Ms. Ling could have conducted this session so that all the students formulated their own answers to each question. After all, students hardly benefit from this type of questioning strategy session unless they attempt to develop their own answers. Here are three possible alternatives that Ms. Ling might consider:

1. She might frame questions with directions similar to these: "I am going to ask a question. Each of you is to answer the question in your mind. Don't tell us your answer or volunteer to do so until I call on you. Just silently hold your answer in your mind . . . Okay, how do the sequences written in red differ from those written in blue?" Ms. Ling should then provide time for all students to think of something. She might prompt students with, "Eddie have you thought of your answer yet?" Eddie: "Yes, ma'am." Ms. Ling: "Fine, hang on to it. How about you, Judy?" . . . If students volunteer or speak out before the class is ready, Ms. Ling should focus attention away from them. After all, the thinking of a student who is trying to develop an answer will be disrupted upon hearing a classmate's answer. Ms. Ling might terminate the wait with, "Maunsell, give us your answer." Maunsell responds . . . Ms. Ling: "How about yours, Mary?" Mary responds . . . Ms. Ling: "Danny, compare Mary's answer with Maunsell's."

2. Another possibility is for Ms. Ling to require each student to write answers to questions on a sheet of paper. She could then circulate throughout the room, quietly reading answers while looking over students' shoulders. After everyone has written something, she should select students to read answers aloud. In this way, she would not only involve more students, but she would also have the answers that would be most beneficial to the discussion read aloud.
3. Ms. Ling might also consider having students formulate answers in subgroups and then have the groups report their answers to the whole class for discussion.

Any of these suggestions should engage more students in developing their own answers to the questions.

Students often become disinterested in a lesson because the pace is either too slow or too fast for them. For example, they may have already achieved the lesson's goal or they may lack prerequisites for achieving the goal. Even classes that are homogeneously grouped according to ability can contain several achievement levels so that the problem persists (80). Flexible within-class groups can sometimes help maintain the interest of a class composed of a wide range of achievement levels. Here is an example:

Mr. Citerelli is a secondary school English teacher who uses informal observations and formal tests to preassess his students' abilities, not only for the objectives that he helps them achieve, but also for prerequisite skills such as reading levels. In addition, he conducts surveys of student interests and assesses student attitudes toward learning. Then he uses this information to design lessons that incorporate a variety of within-class grouping patterns.

During one lesson Mr. Citerelli is attempting to help tenth graders improve their writing talents. Students are to work in pairs, gathering information on a topic, and then presenting a written report on the topic to the remainder of the class. From his prior observations and preassessments, Mr. Citerelli knows that Gomez displays advanced writing skills while Simon lacks both interest and skill in writing. The teacher realizes, however, that Simon is very interested in interscholastic wrestling while Gomez shows no interest in such sports. Mr. Citerelli decides to group Simon and Gomez together for the writing assignment and require them to report on the various area high school wrestling teams. He believes that this design will allow each boy's strengths to complement the other. Simon will learn about writing from Gomez, while

Gomez will depend upon Simon's knowledge and interest in wrestling to complete the report. Such grouping, the teacher thinks, will require Gomez to practice advanced writing skills since he will have to apply his writing talents to an unfamiliar subject. The teacher also believes that in time Simon will increase his interest in writing because of his interest in the topic and because he will be depended upon to provide the necessary expertise for the writing assignment.

Teachers sometimes view the diversity of interests and achievement levels existing among their students as a hindrance to a smoothly operating classroom. But one way to take advantage of this diversity is to use *flexible* within-class or intraclass grouping, as Mr. Citerelli did.

Chapter 4

ESTABLISHING RULES OF CONDUCT

> Insecurity is endemic to the beginning teacher. She wants assurance. As a result, some teachers seek to be popular with their students. There is a difference between popularity and a genuine helping relationship.
>
> —Kevin Ryan and James Cooper, *Those Who Can, Teach*

PURPOSES OF RULES

Like most teachers at King High School, Ms. Loberg has a rule prohibiting students from wearing hats in the classroom. Ms. Loberg grew up with the notion that hats are not to be worn indoors and that boys and men display poor taste by doing so. Ms. Loberg frequently finds herself interrupting her lessons to deal with a hat-wearing student. She is especially nervous about violation of this rule because occasionally Coach Krause, a colleague who tries to "help out" inexperienced women teachers such as Ms. Loberg, has come into her classroom and pulled a student from his seat for wearing a hat. Ms. Loberg is flattered by Coach Krause's attention, so she does not tell him to discontinue this "help." However, she is annoyed by his disruptive interference.

Rules should be established to serve only one or more of the following purposes:

1. *To Maximize On-Task Behaviors.* Rules that protect students from disruptions during lessons are necessary. Normally, the wearing of hats during a lesson is not disruptive.

2. *To Discourage Disruptions to Other Classes or Persons Located in or Near the School.* Even on-task behaviors of one group of students during a lesson can disturb another group during a different lesson. For example, music students in one room who are singing loudly may be on task, but at the same time they may be distracting students in an adjoining room who are viewing a film. The school community should be protected from such disturbances. Ms. Loberg's prohibition against wearing hats did not serve this purpose.

3. *To Provide a Safe, Secure Environment for Students, School Personnel, and Visitors to the School Campus.* A school can hardly function if its campus is unsafe. Hat-wearing rarely poses a threat to safety.

4. *To Maintain Acceptable Standards of Decorum Among Students, School Personnel, and Visitors to the School.* If Ms. Loberg's rule prohibiting hats could be justified, it would be based on this fourth purpose. A school community operates more effectively when common courtesy is practiced by all. However, teachers or other school personnel with governing responsibilities should not attempt to remake students in their own image. Ms. Loberg may have thought wearing a hat in a classroom displayed poor taste, but obviously hat-wearing students did not find the practice distasteful. When rules of courtesy are being established for a heterogeneous mix of students from a variety of backgrounds, it is advisable to define discourtesy in terms of what inconveniences others and not simply in terms of what one cultural group considers unbecoming.

An unnecessary rule—one that does not serve any of these four purposes—creates problems for teachers. Once a rule is established, teachers become responsible for its enforcement. Unenforced rules serve to teach students that rules in general need not be taken seriously. The existence of unnecessary rules undesirably affects individual students in one or more of the following ways:

1. Students who heed unnecessary rules become conditioned to being regulated by authority even when there is no rational basis for such regulation.
2. Students who resist unnecessary rules "get into trouble"; this disturbs their on-task behaviors and usually "turns them off" to school.
3. Students tend to generalize that if some rules are unimportant, then other rules are also unimportant.

DETERMINING RULES

Whatever rules are determined, each regulation should be justified in terms of one or more of the four purposes stated. Ideally, classroom rules should correspond to general systemwide and schoolwide policies and regulations—such as a schoolwide policy regulating food consumption on school property. In many schools, however, inconsistency exists between the rules established for different classrooms (15). Such inconsistency is especially confusing to students who are governed by two or more sets of conflicting rules in a departmentalized school. For example, a student may be allowed to borrow from classmates in a math class, but not in a Spanish language class.

When to establish rules for an individual classroom is a question that causes controversy among educators. Jacobsen suggests that a teacher should see that classroom rules are established at the outset of the school year (44). This view cites the advantages of preventing disruptions by immediately regulating procedures for speaking, moving about, obtaining materials, and other recurring matters. Other educators agree with Brown's position that the disadvantages of immediately setting rules usually outweigh the advantages:

Establishing a rigid set of standards at the outset potentially raises two additional problems. First, the rules established by the teacher may prescribe behavior for students who have been previously reinforced for breaking rules; and secondly, it places the teacher in the position of enforcing rules which although made to do so, do not fit all students in all situations. For these reasons, it seems to be unwise strategy to establish a large number of rules at the outset.

When, then, should rules be set forth? Simply, when the need for a rule arises. Because most students have learned that groups have rules, many of them will ask during the first meeting about classroom regulations. Since the request comes from students, the teacher is in an excellent position to launch into a democratic approach to classroom discipline. At this point, students can be asked about rules which are needed for optimal learning. Some preliminary rules are then established with students. Additional rules can be established when the need for them arises. Rules are needed whenever the behavior of students endangers the attainment of class goals or when the rights of others, including the teacher, are infringed upon. (14)

No matter when they are established, there is general agreement that a few clearly stated classroom rules that encompass a broad range of situations are far more effective than a long list of regulations, each one of which deals with a specific situation. Brophy and Putnam recommend that rules be stated in functional terms rather than in restrictive, absolute terms (11). For example, "When you finish individual classwork before others, be careful not to disturb students who are still working" is preferable to "Remain silently in your seat after completing classwork until the teacher tells you that you may talk and move about."

Ms. Cheek has a rule in her seventh grade class that during any group test, each student should turn in his/her paper upon completing it and then return silently to his/her seat and sit there until all test papers have been turned in to the teacher.

During one such test, Malcolm and Lorenzo have both completed their tests and are waiting for others to finish. Kim is sitting at the desk between the two boys, still taking her test, when Malcolm raises himself out of his seat to lean over Kim to hand Lorenzo a pencil. Upon observing this disturbance, Ms. Cheek beckons Malcolm to her, saying, "Do you know the rule about getting out of your seat?" Malcolm: "Yes, but I was only giving Lorenzo his pencil. I didn't get out of my seat." Ms. Cheek: "How could you return Lorenzo's pencil to him and remain in your seat?" Malcolm: "My left knee never left my seat, I stretched way over." Ms. Cheek: "Well, that's getting out of your seat!" Malcolm: "Even if my knee was still touching?"

This inane conversation and ridiculous waste of time could have been avoided if Ms. Cheek's rule had been stated in functional terms rather than in restrictive, absolute terms. The real concern should not have been whether Malcolm left his seat, but whether he was disturbing other students who were still taking the test. Ms. Cheek's regulation did not seem to be directed consistently toward the prevention of disturbances. During the test while classmates were still working, students were permitted to walk up to the teacher's desk when ready to turn in their papers and when beckoned by the teacher. This defeated the purpose of avoiding disturbances by remaining in one's seat.

If Ms. Cheek's rule were stated in such terms as "Be careful not to disturb classmates who are still taking their tests," judgment could be exercised in specific situations as to what were reasonable ways of preventing disturbances. Without technically leaving his seat (according to his interpretation), Malcolm disturbed his classmates who were taking the test. Whether or not he left his seat was unimportant. But he should learn to care about protecting classmates' opportunities to take tests.

Teachers have the responsibility for seeing that necessary classroom rules are established. However, do these rules serve their four purposes more effectively when teachers determine them or when the students themselves agree upon them? In other words, should you use authoritarian means to determine regulations, should you determine them yourself but base them upon student input, or should your students determine them democratically? Provided that you determine them shrewdly, there are advantages to establishing classroom rules without benefit of student discussion or input. When adequate reflection and

flexibility are employed, such authoritarian tactics can be time-efficient and effective. Students who are never given the opportunity to question regulations openly and exert an influence on their determination may be more inclined to follow them without expressing opposition. On the other hand, once an issue is open for class discussion, students who disagree with its resolution tend to continue to discuss it even after it has been decided upon. That is, students who voted against a rule adopted by the majority, may not accept it without at least verbal opposition.

You may choose to retain the right to make the rules, but allow your determination to be influenced by student opinions. The following anecdote gives an example of this practice.

Ms. Clifford tells her class, "I have received three separate complaints that other classes were disturbed while some of us were going to the library. We will continue to need to make trips to the library during this period for the next three or four weeks. Should a rule be made to prevent any of us from disturbing other classes?" A number of students raise their hands. Ms. Clifford: "Dale?" Dale: "The trouble is that three or four of us go at once. Maybe you should allow only one to go at at time." Ms. Clifford: "I will consider that. Any other suggestions? . . . Jim?" Jim: "Find out who's causing trouble and don't let them go to the library again. They can do their assignments after school." Yolanda: "But we really weren't doing anything wrong! . . . Mrs. Crooks is always trying to get us in trouble." Ms. Clifford: "That's irrelvant, Yolanda. I really don't care about what has already happened. I just want to make sure that we don't disturb other classes in the future." Jean: "Do we really need a rule if we just promise to keep quiet from now on?" Ms. Clifford: "That's what I would like to decide . . . How many of you think that we need a rule to cover this situation? Raise your hands . . . One, two, three . . . Mmmm, most of you believe we need a rule . . . Okay, let's not take much more time with this now. I would like each of you to take out a sheet of paper and suggest what you think I should do in one to three sentences. Please do not put your name on the paper . . . I'll take your papers home with me and consider your suggestions tonight. I'll have a decision for you in the morning."

Ms. Clifford's method for determining this rule provided her with the benefit of the group's collective wisdom. While she retained her

right to decide upon the rule, she elicited her students' opinions in a manner that did not waste time with irrelevant discussions. If she uses their suggestions at times and explains her decisions whenever she does not, the students are more likely to understand and cooperate with the rules than in cases where teachers are more authoritarian.

Many would agree that in a society that values democracy, the concept is best learned by students when they govern themselves democratically. Furthermore, it can be argued that students are more likely to appreciate and adhere to regulations that are established by their own vote. Under such a system of rule-making, the teacher's role is threefold:

1. To establish the necessary structure for democratic determination of the rules
2. To provide leadership to encourage the establishment of appropriate rules
3. To ensure that democratic processes are followed so that each student has the opportunity to participate.

Mr. Cooper has 12 hand-held, battery-operated calculators available in his classroom for the use of his 32 eighth graders. The calculators are kept in a box on a supply table in the back of the room. Except for certain exercises designed to improve students' computational skills and certain tests designed to assess those computational skills, students generally have free access to the calculators.

In time, however, Mr. Cooper notices with increasing frequency that calculators are left on when not in use and that students fail to return them quickly to the box after use. Also, students begin to complain that they have trouble obtaining a working calculator when they need one. The teacher maintains a supply of batteries purchased with class treasury money. Funds for the treasury were supplied by class moneymaking projects and by monies paid by students for materials, such as pencils.

Mr. Cooper calls a "class community meeting" to address complaints about the calculators. Whenever these meetings are held, the students know that they are operating under *Robert's Rules of Order* (64) and they can raise issues of common concern. At this meeting, Mr. Cooper describes the recurring problems of calculator use; he proposes that the situation be resolved.

After a discussion, the group agrees that rules governing the use of the calculators are needed. A motion by Roy and seconded by another student states that anyone who does not turn a calculator off and return it to the supply table will never again be allowed to use one. After some discussion, the motion is amended to change the restriction of calculator use by offending students from life to a week for the first offense, two weeks for the second, and so forth. Mr. Cooper and several students argue that the motion should be voted down for now and other proposals considered that would take care of the problem without restricting calculator use. They base their argument on two points:

1. Students' work would be impaired if the calculators were not available to them.

2. Such a rule would at times place the class or the teacher in the undesirable position of having to determine who left a calculator on or who failed to return one.

The motion fails 14 to 15 with two abstentions and one student absent. Amanda then proposes that students be allowed to use calculators only while standing at the supply table. She argues that they should be able to use them without removing them from the area, that the machines might be secured to the table. The motion is defeated after students argue that the table would become congested and they need the calculators at their desks. After further discussion the following motion finally passes:

> The batteries will be removed from the calculators and those batteries will be held in storage. Four unused batteries will be distributed to each student from those already in storage and from additional ones purchased from the class treasury. (Each calculator takes four AA batteries to operate.)
>
> Each calculator will be marked with an identification numeral and kept in the supply table box without batteries. Each student may obtain a calculator by checking it out, writing his/her name, time, and date, and the calculator's numeral on a check-out/check-in sheet to be left on the supply table. While using a calculator, students are to use their own batteries, which they are to remove before returning the equipment to the box.
>
> Students will be required to maintain their own supply of batteries just as they do their pencils and paper. Batteries will be kept on hand for sale when needed, at a profit for the class treasury.

The motion seems a bit complicated, but Mr. Cooper helps students work out the necessary procedural details that make the written rule appear complex. Once the regulation is in effect for a week or so, however, it leads to established behavior patterns that students follow with little thought of the written description in the minutes of the class community meetings.

COMMUNICATING RULES TO STUDENTS

To be effective, classroom rules must be understood by class members. Students will not always grasp the meaning and intent of rules that have been related to them. Just as students understand and misunderstand subject matter content in varying degrees, so too do they understand and interpret rules differently. Thus, it is necessary to teach the significance, intent, meaning, and consequences of classroom regulations. For most rules, especially with older students, the lessons may simply involve displaying and discussing them with an ongoing use of appropriate cues. For more complex rules, more elaborate lessons may be necessary, especially with younger students. Gudmundsen suggests that students participate in role-playing sessions to demonstrate rules (40). In the following example, Ms. Joseph used role playing to help her sixth graders understand two rules.

Ms. Joseph announces to her class: "Adella, Kayleen, and Craig have been rehearsing a skit for you. Adella will play the role of the teacher, while Kayleen and Craig will act as two students during a class discussion. Although we have only three actors on our 'stage,' keep in mind that Kayleen and Craig are just two of a whole class of students. Imagine them surrounded by others . . . After the skit, we will discuss what we heard and saw . . . Okay, take over, actors."

Adella: Would anyone in the class like to tell us his or her favorite historical character from those we've studied so far this year? (Kayleen raises her hand.) Yes, Kayleen.

Kayleen: I don't know if he's my favorite, but I really like Gandhi.

Adella: Tell us why Gandhi appeals to you.

Kayleen: Because he was able to accept people of—

Craig (interrupting): George Washington, he's the father of our country! I like George!

Kayleen: Nobody cares what you think or like!

At this point Ms. Joseph says, "Okay, that's the end of our skit." Then she conducts a discussion in which class members empathize with the characters and she points out how Craig violated the class rule, "Allow others the freedom to speak during class discussions." The consequences of Craig's interruption are also brought out, as are the consequences of Kayleen's violation of another rule, "Be considerate of the feelings of others."

ENFORCING RULES

An existing rule that is not enforced or that is inconsistently enforced is far more detrimental to the smooth operation of a class than one that has never been established. Students need to be able to predict the consequences of their actions.

Chapter 5

AVOIDING MISCOMMUNICATION

> Should you really open your eyes and see,
> you would behold your image in all images.
> And should you open your ears and listen,
> you would hear your own voice in all voices.
>
> —Kahlil Gibran, *Sand and Foam*

AVOID BEING OFF TASK YOURSELF

Do you remember having a lesson interrupted by another adult—a principal, a parent, a teacher, or a supervisor—who, after apologizing, asked to speak with you? How did you react to the situation? Did you apologize to your students and then speak with the individual? If so, what impression did this leave on your students? By allowing an avoidable interruption in a lesson to occur, you unwittingly communicate to your students that the lesson is of secondary importance. By quickly apologizing to the adult and asking to speak after the lesson, you communicate to your students that the lesson is important to you. Once teachers get off task, it is difficult for students to become reengaged when teachers are ready to resume the lesson. Students will model their teachers' behavior (53). Unless teachers display a business-like attitude toward lessons, they cannot expect their students to take their work seriously.

Do not be disruptive yourself. Compare the two anecdotes that follow. In one, the teacher creates a more serious disruption than the one she is handling.

Ms. Blythe is lecturing to her eleventh grade class. Jane, one of her 26 students, begins tapping her pencil against her desk top and looking around. Ms. Blythe finds Jane's behavior annoying and judges it to be a potential distraction to other students. She interrupts her own lecture, turns to Jane from the front of the room, and complains, "Will you stop that noise? Can't you do what you're supposed to do?"

Ms. Guevarra is lecturing to her eleventh grade class. Jean, one of her 26 students, begins tapping her pencil against her desk top and looking around. Ms. Guevarra finds Jean's [illegible] annoying and judges it to be a potential distraction to other students. She continues her lecture as she walks to a point near the girl. Jean stops looking around and attends to the lecture, but she keeps tapping her pencil. Ms. Guevarra gently removes the pencil from her hand. Jean receives the message. Other class members are unaware of what is happening as their attention is not disturbed by the teacher's handling of the incident.

Ms. Blythe's response to Jane's off-task behavior appeared to be a reaction to annoyance that resulted in an attack on Jane's personality. Instead of focusing her attention on the problem of reengaging Jane in the lesson, she interrupted the lesson with an irrelevant, rhetorical question ("Can't you do what you're supposed to do?"). Such tactics may have succeeded in getting Jane to stop tapping and looking around. However, they not only interrupted the other students, but they did not engage Jane in the lesson. Jane was too busy pondering the incident, which she probably found insulting and embarrassing, and only pretended to be attending to the lecture. She would be a very unusual teenager if she were able to concentrate on the content of the lecture immediately after being asked in front of her peers, "Can't you do what you're supposed to do?"

AVOID SENDING UNINTENDED MESSAGES

Students in Ms. Coco's French language class are exempted from weekend homework assignments if they have a "perfect conduct" record for the week. Those who have "misbehaved" during the week are assigned weekend homework.

Ms. Coco was unwittingly teaching students that homework assignments are a punishment and no homework assignments are a reward. If such assignments help students achieve worthwhile goals, then doing them certainly must be important to all students. It may appear strange, but a more logical course for Ms. Coco to follow would be to reward "perfect conduct" by assigning homework and to punish "misbehavior" by not assigning it. This logic is, of course, nonsense—but only if homework assignments are intended to help all students achieve worthwhile learning goals.

Ms. Criss "catches" Quinn, one of her tenth graders, shooting paperclips across her room. She sends him to an assistant principal who administers three swats to Quinn's buttocks with a wooden paddle.

Shooting paperclips is a dangerous practice that no teacher should tolerate. But what did Ms. Criss and the assistant principal unwittingly teach Quinn by their actions? They intended to teach him not to shoot paperclips in the classroom. However, research suggests that the experience did not teach the boy that lesson (27). Besides a possible lesson about getting caught, Quinn may have learned that one human being hitting another is perfectly acceptable behavior condoned by school authorities. Quinn may model the assistant principal's actions and develop a pattern of punishing others by inflicting pain (34). The undesirable effects of corporal punishment are well documented (43).

Because they are continually dealing with highly complex and impressionable human beings, it is important that teachers pause and reflect on the consequences of their words and actions. By doing so, they can avoid unknowingly creating additional problems when they attempt to deal with a particular incident.

AVOID TEACHING STUDENTS TO IGNORE YOU

Unfortunately, many students readily learn to be "deaf" to teachers because of exposure to meaningless conversations with adults. Note the following example:

Rutherford is working in a small reading group in Ms. Sorenson's sixth grade class when he gets up and begins walking across the room. Ms. Sorenson sees him and says, "Rutherford, don't get up!"

By the time Ms. Sorenson told Rutherford not to get up, he was already up and walking. It was possible for Rutherford to sit down, but it was impossible for him never to have stood up once he did so. Ms. Sorenson was unwittingly teaching him not to listen to her by giving a direction that he could not possibly obey. It was too late to tell him not to get up. Possibly, she should have told him to return to his place and sit down. Generally speaking, instead of an immediate verbal reaction to students' behavior, teachers should pause and carefully frame their words before speaking.

Adults often send pointless messages to children because they react to situations before they are aware of some pertinent circumstance. Here is an example:

Mr. Hickenlooper directs his tenth graders to read silently pages 78 through 81 at their desks. Noticing Kezia talking to Richard, he says, "Kezia, didn't I say 'silently'?" Kezia replies, "I'm sorry, but I was just telling him the page numbers." Mr. Hickenlooper: "Then that's okay."

Although exchanges such as this cannot always be avoided, they can in time become destructive if they occur habitually. Mr. Hickenlooper's behavior was surely not reprehensible. However, if Kezia were only giving Richard the page numbers, the talking would have self-terminated without the teacher's intervention. By first waiting to see if the talking would quickly stop, the teacher could have avoided a useless exchange of words.

Sometimes teachers and other adults act as if they are terminating a self-terminating behavior or initiating a self-initiating behavior. In these instances they also teach students to ignore them. For example:

At Francis Parker High School teachers are expected to stand in their doorways between classes in order to enforce the hall rules, which include *no running*. Ms. Larsen is standing by her door when she sees Thelma and Emily running toward the room next door. Just as the girls reach their room, they hear Ms. Larsen yell, "Stop running!" At this time they are about to stop running, not because of Ms. Larsen's words, but because they have reached their destination.

While no real harm resulted from this incident, it would have been better if Ms. Larsen had either said and done nothing about the running or intervened with some technique for preventing it in the future. For example, she might have called to the girls before they reached their room to remind them about the rule. As it happened, her action served only to remind the students that teachers say some things that mean nothing to them. Thus students can learn to ignore teachers.

Another way that adults encourage students to ignore them is to make judgments for them. For example:

Ms. Boynton is introducing a social studies activity to her ninth graders. In the activity students will examine each other's political beliefs. She announces: "You're really going to like this! It's a lot of fun. It really gets exciting when . . ."

If Ms. Boynton continued in this vein, she would "turn off" her students. Whether or not the students would enjoy the activity, they would judge for themselves. Some would probably find it exciting; others would not. By getting on with the directions so that the students could become engaged in the activity, Ms. Boynton would let them find out for themselves just how much fun and how exciting the lesson was. If Ms. Boynton found the activity to be fun and exciting, she should quickly pass the information on to the students by telling them, "I found this very exciting; I hope you will also." The students would probably like to know how she feels. But she only wasted words by trying to inform them of their feelings. Students will decide their own feelings about the experience individually as they become involved in it. Teachers usually spend too much time trying to persuade students about the value of a lesson when they are uneasy about students' reception of the activity.

USE SUPPORTIVE REPLIES

Mr. Grey's eighth graders are working on a computational exercise when Lisa brings her worksheet to him and exclaims, "I just can't do these! They're too hard for me." Mr. Grey responds, "Aw, come on, Lisa, you can do them. They're not really difficult for a smart girl like you . . . "

Ms. Johnson's eighth graders are working on a computational exercise when Dennis brings his worksheet to her and exclaims, "I just can't do these! They're too hard for me." Ms. Johnson responds, "Dividing decimals can be very difficult. I see that you are having trouble . . . "

In situations of this kind, student's frustrations often need to be dealt with before the sources of their frustrations can be effectively addressed. Ms. Johnson's style of communication is *supportive*, whereas Mr. Grey's is *nonsupportive*. A response to an expression of frustration that sends the message "I hear and understand what you told me and it's okay to feel as you do" is considered supportive (65). Ms. Johnson was supportive because, before trying to help Dennis with the compu-

tations, she let him know that she understood what he told her. Mr. Grey, on the other hand, contradicted Lisa's statement. He was nonsupportive; he did not accept her feelings. He attempted to encourage Lisa by telling her she could do the work. This well-meaning comment only informed the girl that the teacher did not understand her dilemma. Obviously, the computations were difficult for her, yet Mr. Grey told her they were not difficult for a smart girl. Consequently Lisa understood from this remark that she was not smart. Mr. Grey's well-meaning, but nonsupportive, reply increased Lisa's frustration because she then perceived the additional problem of dealing with a teacher who lacked empathy.

AVOID LABELING STUDENTS

Many times I have stopped myself from making comments that label students—for example, "You're really smart, Jake!" or "Why are you so lazy, Ginnie?" Instead, I catch myself and say, "Jake, you really seem to understand why the quadratic formula works!" or "Ginnie, why did you waste so much time today?" Teachers need to make concerted efforts to address specifically the student's achievement or lack of achievement, behavior or concern. They also need to avoid inferences that label or characterize students (75).

Because a student does not comprehend the messages from several readings does not necessarily imply that the student is a "slow learner" or even a "poor reader." It only means that he or she did not grasp the messages from those readings. The lack of comprehension might stem from a lack of interest in the material, from thought patterns that tend to diverge from those of the authors of the readings, or from a number of causes that do not fall under a general label such as "poor reader." Students who acquire a general label such as "poor reader" are, however, likely to find it difficult to read even when they are interested in the material, when they have no misconceptions about the content, and when they do not think divergently from the author.

By the same token, because a student readily comprehends what is generally considered a difficult-to-grasp scientific concept does not necessarily imply that the student is especially "bright" or even that the student has a "scientific mind." It only means that she or he

grasps that particular scientific concept. To label such students "bright" or "scientific-minded" is to ask them to live up to someone else's image and to teach them to be elitist. Furthermore, to label such students "bright" is to unwittingly label those who do not grasp the concept "dull" (35).

Because a student is disruptive during several or even many lessons does not imply hostility or a behavior problem. Students become disruptive because they are bored, they do not recognize value in being on task, they seek attention, they feel defensive about participating in the lesson, or a number of other reasons that are not inherent in their personalities. Students who learn that they are thought of as "behavior problems" feel obliged to live with—or even up to—that label. They find themselves in a "no-win" situation because they believe the teacher does not care about them. They think, "Who wants to tolerate a behavior problem?" On the other hand, students who learn that they are "okay" (41), even though they display certain behaviors that are problems, may be willing to alter those behaviors.

Students would be much less defensive and consequently much more likely to cooperate if adults did not require them to put their self-worth on the line whenever they undertake a task or whenever they are expected to behave in a prescribed manner. Unfortunately, students often think their self-worth is in jeopardy whenever they attempt tasks prescribed by teachers. By avoiding miscommunication in the classroom, teachers can do much to prevent this student reaction.

Chapter 6

DEALING WITH OFF-TASK BEHAVIORS

> It seems to me, that just as it usually seems to my kind, that society was simply trying to strip or rip my shield, that it was willing to do so ruthlessly, that it didn't care about me personally, or the amount of humiliation or degradation it might inflict in the process. I stubbornly balked at being manipulated, regulated, or being compelled to conform blindly through fear or threat of punishment, however severe. Instead, I came to question the validity of a society that appeared more concerned with imposing its will than in inspiring respect. There seemed to me something grossly wrong with this. "We'll make you be good!" I was told, and I told myself nobody should, would or could *make* me anything. And I proved it.
>
> —Caryl Chessman, *Cell 2455 Death Row*

USE A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

By maintaining students' interest, effectively managing time and space, avoiding miscommunication, and effectively establishing rules of conduct, you will reduce the frequency with which you will have to deal with off-task behaviors. However, with 30 or more adolescents in a classroom, there may well be some incidents. The key to dealing effectively with disruptions or off-task behaviors in general is to maintain a clear, cool head by focusing on your purpose—to keep students engaged in worthwhile lessons. The following is an example of a teacher who was able to deal effectively with a rather serious disruption because she focused on her purpose and attacked the problem systematically:

Keith, a member of Ms. Umbach's ninth grade remedial math class, is working in a small group lesson with four other students playing multiplication bingo. When the game conductor calls out "Seventeen times 33," the students begin computing and Dan exclaims, "Bingo!" Keith stands up and yells, "Dan, you stupid jerk! I was about to get bingo! You cheated!" With these words, Keith shoves Dan over and upsets everyone's game cards. Ms. Umbach has been completing paperwork at her desk when she hears Keith yell and then observes the incident. She arrives unhesitatingly on the scene, uses one hand to grab Keith by the arm, and briskly walks him out the classroom door into the hallway. "You wait here while I check to see if I can help Dan. He may be hurt," she says calmly to Keith, looking directly into his eyes. She immediately turns her back to the boy without giving him a chance to speak. She has already noted initially that Dan was not hurt, but she returns to the bingo scene where an audience has gathered around Dan who is beginning to express his intention of retaliating. Ms. Umbach interrupts Dan with "I am sorry about what happened, but I am happy that you are not hurt." Before anyone can complain about Keith or before Dan can make any further threats, the teacher continues, "Tanya and Bart, I would appreciate your picking up this mess and setting up the bingo game again. We'll start over with four players." Then she raises her voice, saying, "Everyone return to your work. Thank you."

Ms. Umbach quickly returns to Keith in the hall and says, "I do not have time now to deal with the way you behaved during multiplication bingo. Right now, I have a class to teach and you have to continue practicing multiplication. We'll have time to discuss how we can stop these disruptions before the first bell tomorrow morning. As soon as your bus arrives tomorrow, I want you to meet me at my desk. Will you remember or should I call your house tonight to remind you?" Keith: "I'll remember." Ms. Umbach: "Good! Now, you still need to work on your multiplication. We have about 12 minutes to do that. Go get your workbook and bring it to me at my desk." Keith complies and Ms. Umbach directs him to complete a multiplication exercise at a table away from other students. The multiplication exercise is a drill on the same skills that the bingo game was designed to develop.

After school that day, Ms. Umbach has the following thoughts:

> Well, I bought myself some time to decide what to do about Keith's outbursts and fighting! . . . I took a chance grabbing him the way I did; with his temper he might have turned on me. And then what would have happened? . . . Let's see, this is at least the third such display that's occurred while Keith was supposed to be doing small group work. I don't know if he's always been the cause, but he's always been in the middle . . . That's not important. What is important is to prevent a recurrence before somebody gets hurt . . . I'll just remove him from any small group work, as I did today. I hope he didn't think I was punishing him by assigning the workbook multiplication . . . But he must learn that antisocial

behavior will not be tolerated in my classroom . . . Tomorrow, maybe I should explain my dilemma to him and ask what he would do to solve the problem if he were in my place. That tactic worked well when I tried it with Lynwood . . . But no, Keith isn't ready for that yet; he's too defensive. Okay, here's what I'll try:

1. Tomorrow, I will not even try to explain my reasons for what I'm doing (that will only give Keith a chance to argue and act defensively and I don't need that). I will simply tell him what we're going to do and not try to defend the plan.
2. Whenever he would normally be doing small group work, I will assign him to work by himself at a table away from the others. His assignment will be comparable in content and, when possible, will have a goal similar to what he would be doing in the small group.
3. I'll observe for indicators that he will be more willing to cooperate in group activities.
4. As I see encouraging indications, I will gradually work him back in with the other students. But I will begin very slowly and only with brief, noncompetitive-type activities.

Now I'd better prepare for this . . . What should I do if he doesn't show up before school tomorrow? . . .

Ms. Umbach viewed the problem of eliminating the undesirable behavior just as she would view the question of helping a student to achieve a learning objective. By applying teaching techniques to the task of teaching students to choose engaged behaviors instead of off-task behaviors, she was able to focus her time, energy, and thought on the real issues at hand. She did not, for example, try to moralize to Keith about the evils of fighting. She was realistic enough to know that such lecturing would fall on deaf ears.

Teachers who do not systematically focus on the behavior to be altered—for example, Ms. Blythe in the first anecdote in Chapter 5 (page 39)—tend to compound difficulties by dwelling on irrelevant issues. Teachers who fail to focus on the goal of getting and keeping students engaged in lessons feel offended when students become disruptive or do not pay attention. When this happens, there is a tendency to retaliate, "to put students in their places." Teachers who keep their goal in mind are far more likely to realize that students are usually not threatening them by off-task behavior, nor are students off task in order to traumatize them.

By keeping their purpose in mind, teachers can find it easier to remember that students get off task because of boredom, wanting to call attention to themselves, feeling threatened or frustrated, or because of some other reason that is not a personal attack on the teacher.

13 SUGGESTIONS TO KEEP IN MIND

The pages that follow contain some general suggestions to consider when confronted with students who are off task.

1. Deal with off-task behavior as you would with any other student need.

How would you ordinarily react to a student who did not read as well as you would like him or her to read? Rather than react in anger to the lack of reading proficiency, you would undoubtedly take steps either to improve the student's reading or to work around the difficulty. You can approach students who need to modify their conduct or attention level in the same way. Use sound teaching methods to help them decide to replace off-task behaviors with on-task behaviors or to work around the former. Familiarity with a variety of models for confronting off-task behaviors will be helpful in this undertaking.

There are many educational theories from which you might pull some ideas. They include the following:

a. The *noninterventionist* approach (38) is based on the assumption that children are innately inclined toward moral conduct and they should be in control of their own actions. Teachers who apply this approach work to establish a nonjudgmental atmosphere that provides students with opportunities to solve their own behavior problems.

b. The *behaviorist* approach (14) emphasizes that students' behaviors are shaped by the external environment. Teachers who apply this approach manipulate the students' surroundings in order to stimulate desirable behavior patterns.

c. The *interactionist* approach (36) stresses the guidance role of teachers in helping students to choose desirable behaviors. This approach is similar to noninterventionism in that students are held responsible for their own behaviors; it is similar to behaviorism in that teachers are expected to serve as major influences on students' choice of behaviors.

2. Deal decisively with an incident of off-task behavior or don't deal with it at all.

In the anecdote in Chapter 5 (page 42), Ms. Larsen should have used an effective method to teach Thelma and Emily to obey hall rules or she should have ignored their running altogether. It is a waste of time and energy to use half-hearted attempts that do more harm than good. Jones found that teachers handle discipline problems far more effectively when they speak face-to-face, directly to a student than when they speak "over-the-shoulder" in a "matter-of-fact" tone (45). Be serious and let the student know that you are serious.

Avoid reacting to general classroom annoyances by sending students vague, ambiguous messages. For example, if a class becomes noisy when you are speaking, don't raise your voice or yell: "Pipe down, it's too noisy in here!" Instead, lower your voice so that it is inaudible as long as students are noisy. If they value what you are saying, they will usually "hush one another up." If they do not become attentive, then switch to another method for imparting your information to them. For example, without another word, write on an overhead transparency or the chalkboard, "Pages 147 through 210 have information on what I've been trying to explain to you. Please study those pages now. I will be walking around the room to see that no one disturbs you as you read." In the preceding anecdote, Ms. Umbach used a similar approach with Keith. The student would not cooperate in the planned lesson, so she provided him with an alternative—and less pleasant—way of achieving the learning goal.

3. Control the time and place for dealing with disruptions.

Ms. Umbach focused her immediate efforts on getting the class back on task after Keith's disruption. She waited until she had time to work out a plan to deal with Keith in a setting that she could readily

control. If she had tried to teach Keith not to be disruptive at the time and place of the incident, she would have had to contend with the following disadvantages:

a. She would have had to supervise the rest of the class and therefore could not have given Keith her full attention.

b. She would have had little time for deciding what to do.

c. Both Ms. Umbach and Keith would not have had time to cool off.

d. Keith would have had an audience of peers whose perceptions were more important to him than whatever Ms. Umbach was trying to do—so he would have been thinking more about what they were thinking than about what the teacher was saying.

Don't try to make examples of disruptive students in front of the class. First get everyone back on task and then deal with preventing future occurrences at a time and place that you can effectively control. Don't worry that your students will think that the disrupter "got off." Word will get back to them that you handled the situation decisively.

4. Always leave students a face-saving way to terminate an incident.

Teachers are asking for major trouble whenever they allow a student to become embarrassed in front of peers. Many times in my teaching career students have made insulting remarks to me. In anger, I have been tempted to return such rudeness with a retort. Given that the student is an adolescent and the teacher an adult, it is not surprising that the student is vulnerable to a witty put-down by a teacher reacting to a student insult. But it is critical that teachers resist the temptation to play any verbal games that detract from the dignity of a businesslike learning environment. The following is an unfortunate incident that I observed in a junior high classroom:

In the course of giving directions to his class, Mr. Canisius says, " . . . And what can I do if the work is not done on time? . . . " In a barely audible voice, Charlie is heard to say, "You can go get lost." "What did you say?!" shouts

Mr. Canisius. Charlie just looks around the room, grins sheepishly, and puts his head down. He says nothing. "What did you say?" repeats Mr. Canisius. "Nothing," whispers Charlie. "I didn't hear you," Mr. Canisius says in a much calmer voice, feeling more confident now that Charlie seems to be backing down. Charlie responds, "I said 'nothing.' I didn't say anything." "That's what I thought. I didn't think you said anything, because you never say anything worth hearing!" retorts Mr. Canisius in a superior-sounding voice. Some class members look at each other and grin; others watch Charlie wondering what he is going to do next. Suddenly Charlie looks directly at Mr. Canisius and blurts out, "I said, 'Go get lost!' So why don't you, instead of messing with me!"

By trying to outwit a student, Mr. Canisius turned a self-terminating incident into a major situation that left Charlie's position at the school in serious jeopardy. Mr. Canisius heard Charlie's original insult. What was his motive in asking, "What did you say?" What options did such a question leave the student? Initially, Charlie tried to terminate the incident by not responding to the teacher's question. But Mr. Canisius forced the issue and Charlie provided him with the expected lie by denying what he had said. Getting Charlie to back down gave Mr. Canisius false confidence. Because an insecure adult tried to prove his "superiority" over an adolescent, the entire incident was blown out of proportion.

Mr. Canisius should have left Charlie a dignified way out of the unpleasant situation either by ignoring his original rudeness or by politely directing Charlie to visit with him after class.

5. Terminate disruptions without playing detective.

In the previous anecdote, Mr. Canisius knew that Charlie was the source of the rude comment. Many times, however, teachers are unable to detect the source of disruptions. Here is such an example:

Some students in Mr. Babin's history class frequently amuse themselves while the teacher is talking by covertly screeching "Whoop-whoop!" Mr. Babin is habitually interrupted by the rude noise either when he is trying to explain something to the group or when he is working with an individual student. Initially Mr. Babin reacted to the annoyance with, "All right! Who's the bird in

here?" He has often tried unsuccessfully to catch the culprits. More and more students are displaying their boldness with the cry and their cleverness at covering up the source.

In his frustration, Mr. Babin turns to Ms. Travis, a colleague, for advice. Ms. Travis indicates to him that the students don't really intend to make his life miserable (which they are surely doing), but they are simply relieving their boredom by playing a game of cat and mouse with him. Ms. Travis suggests that Mr. Babin quit trying to catch the culprits and thus put an end to the game. She advises him to design a plan for terminating the discourtesy without worrying about identifying the guilty. Ms. Travis tells him:

> Make up your mind not to care who is making the rude noises. The students know it annoys you or they wouldn't continue it. So you're not giving away any secrets by confronting them with the fact that you are hurt by such rudeness. Tell them that you cannot teach them effectively when they're making disruptive noises. But also tell them that you are responsible for seeing that they learn history. Therefore, when you're talking to any one or to all of the students and you hear that noise, stop and tell them that since they won't let you talk to them, you simply won't try. Discontinue the explanation you were giving at the time of the interruption and write a note on the chalkboard directing them to read for themselves the material from the book that you had planned to cover in class. Remind them, in the note, of the date on which they will be tested on the material. Don't answer questions or give explanations until the next meeting period when you'll once again give them the opportunity to treat you courteously. Remember not to delay or delete material from the scheduled test. I think that they'll quickly tire of trying to learn without your help. They'll put pressure on each other to stop the rude noises. Remember to start each period fresh so grudges won't build from day to day.

Mr. Babin's experience should illustrate the value of the next two suggestions.

6. Seek counsel from trusted colleagues.

You are in the best position to decide how to handle your problems with your class. However, colleagues can be helpful. Identify other teachers with whom you can exchange ideas on handling each other's discipline problems. Sit in on each other's classes; advise each other. But a word of caution: Do not relinquish the professional trust that students should have in you by gossiping about them or sharing

information about them with unauthorized persons. Discuss an individual student's problem only with other professionals or authorized persons—such as parents—in order to help solve the problem.

7. Have alternative lesson plans available for times when students do not cooperate as planned.

8. Work as diligently to decrease the incidence of nondisruptive off-task behaviors as to decrease the incidence of disruptions.

Nondisruptive off-task behaviors—such as mind-wandering, failing to attempt assignments, being under the influence of drugs during lessons, sleeping in class, and even cheating on tests—are sometimes disregarded because they do not necessarily interfere with the activities of the class as a whole. However, teachers need to be concerned with all forms of student nonengagement for the following reasons:

a. When students are off task, they are failing to benefit from the planned lesson and are therefore diminishing their chances of achieving a learning goal efficiently. The teacher's responsibility for helping students achieve learning goals implies a responsibility for helping them supplant off-task behaviors with on-task behaviors.

b. Because off-task behaviors interfere with learning, even nondisruptive students who are off task tend to fall behind in a lesson. Once students miss one part of a lesson, they are likely not to understand a subsequent part even though they return to engaged behavior. And those who are unable to follow a lesson may well become bored and disruptive.

In the following anecdotes, one example of nondisruptive off-task behavior is mishandled and one is handled well.

Ms. Searcy is explaining to her ninth grade science class how Darwin and Wallace each arrived at his theory of natural selection. Most of the class listens intently. Amy sits up straight, staring directly at Ms. Searcy as she imagines herself high on a horse galloping along a river bank. Ms. Searcy, who watches

her students' faces as she lectures, notices the blank look in Amy's eyes. Suspicious that Amy is not "with her," she pauses and asks the girl, "What do you think about that, Amy?" Amy: " . . . About what?" Ms. Searcy: "About what I said." Amy: "I don't know what you said." Ms. Searcy: "You don't know what I said! Were you daydreaming?" Amy: "I guess so." Ms. Searcy: "Amy, the daydreamer, off in a world of her own! . . . Okay! Let's listen from now on." Amy: "Yes ma'am, I will."

"Off in a world of her own! . . . Amy, the daydreamer!" Amy thinks, still staring directly at Ms. Searcy and now nodding her head as if in agreement. She keeps pondering those words; she likes the sound of "a daydreamer . . . off in a world or her own."

Ms. Smith is explaining to her ninth grade science class how Darwin and Wallace each arrived at his theory of natural selection. Most of the class listens intently. Anita sits up straight, staring directly at Ms. Smith as she imagines herself high on a horse galloping along a river bank. Ms. Smith, who watches her students' faces as she lectures, notices the blank look in Anita's eyes. Suspicious that Anita is not "with her," she pauses and asks the class, "Why do you suppose Darwin waited so long before publishing this theory? . . . Anita?" Anita: " . . . What was the question?" Ms. Smith: "Please repeat the question for those of us who missed it, Michael." Michael: "You asked why Darwin took so long before publishing his stuff." Ms. Smith: "Thanks, Mike. What's your opinion, Debbie?" Debbie gives her opinion and the lecture/discussion continues. Ms. Smith subtly observes Anita to see if her strategy worked.

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9. Allow students to recognize for themselves the natural consequences of not attempting assignments or failing to participate in lessons.

It is not unusual for some teachers to punish students or to artificially manipulate their grades because of failure to attempt assignments or to participate in class activities. However, assignments that are really meaningful to students make such punishment or grade manipulation unnecessary. In the following anecdote, Ms. Goldberg came to realize that as long as her assignments benefited her students, it made no sense either to give them "points toward their grades" for attempting the assignments or to punish them for not doing the assignments.

Ms. Goldberg, a mathematics teacher, uses a procedure in which each student's grade is determined by the number of points accumulated during a semester. Her students have two means of accumulating points: (1) half of the total possible points are based on their test scores; (2) the other half are awarded for homework that, when turned in on time, is scored according to the number of correct responses.

Ms. Goldberg finds that a number of students receive high marks on their homework but low marks on their test papers. Under her system, such students are able to pass the course. After analyzing the matter, she realizes that these students are either copying their homework from others or having others do it for them. Therefore she decides to change her grading procedures. She will annotate students' homework to provide them with feedback, but she will not grade their homework so that it influences their semester reports. Ms. Goldberg begins to make a concerted effort to assign homework and design tests so that completing homework will clearly be an effective way to prepare for tests.

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10. Never use corporal punishment.

There may be times when teachers should physically restrain students to prevent them from injuring themselves, other students, or the teacher. But, for teachers to intentionally inflict physical pain upon a student for the purpose of making the student sorry for some misconduct is always more harmful than helpful (22). Teachers who are familiar with relevant research findings and who value the welfare and well-being of their students will not use corporal punishment (84).

11. Don't try to build a student's character when you should be trying only to keep him/her engaged in a lesson.

In the first anecdote in this chapter, Ms. Umbach did not try to teach Keith about the evils of fighting; she concentrated on teaching him not to fight in her classroom. The teacher in the following anecdote approaches another serious problem with a similar attitude.

Libba, an eleventh grader, stops at a convenience store on her way to school. She buys three cans of beer and consumes them before her 8:45 A.M. homeroom period. Neither her homeroom teacher nor her first period math teacher notices anything strange in her behavior. However, as second period begins, she appears tipsy to Mr. Wagoner, her science teacher. Mr. Wagoner directs two students to begin setting up an experiment that he plans to demonstrate to the class. While they are doing this, he subtly beckons Libba to the doorway and out in the hall. Detecting the odor of alcohol on her breath, he says, "It's your business if you want to mess up your own life. But it's my business to teach you science and I can't teach it to you when you're in that condition. When we've completed this conversation, you go back to your desk. Just keep quiet and concentrate on facing straight ahead . . . Did you hear me?" Libba: "Yes sir." Mr. Wagoner: "Fine. Tomorrow morning, come to this room at 8:15. We'll discuss the matter then. Can you remember to be here or should I remind you?" Libba: "I'll remember; I'll be here."

At 8:15 the next morning, Libba makes her appointment and Mr. Wagoner tells her, "If you ever come into my class again while under the influence of alcohol or any other drug, I will immediately send you to Ms. Swindle's office [the dean of girls]. I will inform Mr. Giradeau [the principal] that I refuse to teach you in that condition. And I will inform your parents of the situation. Do you understand?" Libba: "Yes, but I'm not the only—" Mr. Wagoner (interrupting): "I am not talking with you about others—only you. I don't discuss your problems with other students and I won't discuss theirs with you. Do you understand?" Libba: "Yes!" Mr. Wagoner: "Now, yesterday while you were 'out of it,' we were analyzing this experiment that is described here in my teacher's manual. I want you to take my manual home tonight and analyze the experiment as it is described on pages 79 through 84. Bring in your results and I'll be happy to give you feedback on them as soon as I find the time. That should catch you up with the rest of the class. You won't be behind anymore . . . Okay?" Libba: "Okay." Mr. Wagoner: "See you in class. Keep smiling."

12. Maintain your options; avoid "playing your last card."

Understand the extent and limits of your authority as a teacher. Never threaten a student with something you cannot follow through. For example, if you tell a student, "Either sit down and start your work, or I'll see to it that you never see the inside of this classroom again!" what are you going to do if the student refuses? You have extended your authority as far as it can reach. You have exhausted your

options. Obtain the help of supervisors before you run out of ways to deal with an undesirable situation.

13. Know yourself and know your students.

Continually examine your own motives for dealing with students. Be receptive to individual differences. Measures that are effective with one may be disastrous with another. Be conservative in trying out new ideas with an entire group until you know the students and have found the ideas to be workable with the individuals you know best. On the other hand, don't give up on an idea because it won't work for all students all the time.

The last of these 13 suggestions is perhaps the most important of all. The better you understand yourself and your students, the better you will be able to respond sensitively, flexibly, and effectively to classroom situations such as those described in this book. Better yet, by knowing how to keep your students engaged in their lessons, you will be able to prevent many disruptive and off-task situations from occurring. Thus you and your students will enjoy the benefits of cooperation in the classroom—including an atmosphere that enhances both teaching and learning.

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